

The first St. Stephen's school

We are very fortunate to have junior and infant schools in our area, but did you know that they are the replacement for the original school that opened in 1848?

The man who set up the school was the Rev. John White, husband of Mary Anne Baker, and it was on land that belonged to her family that the school was built, opposite the Olde Beverlie Public House. He paid for the building, [£722.6s 2d.] and was an inspiration to several head teachers.

Schools kept logbooks and the earliest one is from 1863-4 telling us that children could start school at three and some only stayed until they were nine. Children were often expected to help with family finances, working from an early age, especially in rural areas like St Stephen's, harvesting, hop-tying, collecting bark for the tannery and fieldwork or, for girls, helping with the younger members of the family. Attendance was often patchy, also because of frequent colds and childhood diseases like chicken pox or measles. Most of the children lived on farms or in farm cottages and the school roll shows the same surnames over several generations.

Annual inspections were the norm, and a good result meant more money for the school, depending on children's attainment and attendance. A poor result could be disastrous. One headmaster seems to have ignored the inspec-

tions, and the annual grant was reduced twice. Another did extra coaching and what we would call 'mock' tests for about a month before the dreaded day and thus achieved an increased grant. The third tried to focus on what was best for the children and did not push them with extra tests but he bribed them with prizes if they attended for 325 sessions a year and passed Reading, Writing and Arithmetic!

Visitors also appeared in the logbook and Miss Georgiana White, the younger sister of Mary Ann, came to the school many times., especially interested in the girls' needlework. She probably lived in the Manor House on St Stephen's Road and her memorial tablet is in the church, having died on May 7th, 1880. John White had died in 1879, and it seems that, with

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his death, gifts to the school ceased and children were charged two pennies a week for those who lived in the parish and three pence for outsiders. Fortunately, this did not last long as a School Board was elected in 1879, and it became St Stephen's Board School.

Children's behaviour was somewhat different in these much more deferential times. A Mrs Austin wrote, 'I met some children one day going home to Tyler Hill after school. Each girl dropped me a curtsy and said, 'Good afternoon teacher.' The boys also doffed their caps.'

Children needed strong footwear as the roads were mostly tracks and could be extremely muddy and all the children walked to school. Imagine today's young people trekking from here to Tyler Hill in pouring rain, mud and puddles! Many families must have found it hard to keep up with growing feet and the Rector, Canon Hitchen, in 1897 recorded that 'each child had a boot card carried in a small cotton bag. They paid one penny each week which was entered on the card and at the end of the year, the sum received 100% interest from the Rector, to enable the parents to buy strong boots for the children as the roads were very rough and stony.'

Everything changed in the 1950s when hundreds of houses were built in the Hales Place area and in 1953, the infant and junior schools were opened and the old school became a private house. However, if you compare the 1907 photo



of the building with today, there are few changes, and it remains an attractive reminder of St Stephen's nearly two centuries ago.

With thanks to the work of the late Marten Rogers and Margaret Ansell

Ron Waters, one of the founding members of our Association, went to the old school. Ron was born in 1933 and, after being evacuated for a short time, came back to Canterbury and, instead of returning to St Peter's

School because of the likelihood of bombing in the city, attended St Stephen's.

"There was one classroom that was divided; that was the infants and the next year, then the top class round the back. Mrs George took the infants; Miss Golding was the headmistress and Mrs Beckhusen taught us.

There were about eighty or ninety children at St Stephen's in three classes. These children mostly had been evacuated but they didn't like being away from home and they didn't like their

families being split up, so they started to creep back. I was the air raid warning monitor and used to have to stand by the outside door when the siren went. The shelter was at the back of the school. A stream used to run along there. It was a stone building on the surface, quite solid, and we used to sit along the side in forms and sang songs about how many men went to mow, Bill Bailey, Widdicombe Fair, Uncle Tom Cobley, Green Bottles and times tables - we repeated them and repeated them.

One day, I thought I'd heard the siren, but I think it was a lorry coming down the road and I got them all in the air raid shelter. I was a bit more careful after that!

At the back of the old school, we had little plots where we grew vegetables. There was a brick well in the school grounds that is still there. Where Archbishop's is there were allotments. It was the country-no houses, not many roads, fields and orchards and a lot of fun for children like us."

[If you would like a copy of Ron's childhood in St Stephen's and his war time experiences of bombing and the Battle of Britain, email us for a copy.]

The Big Help Out

This summer event was planned to showcase local volunteering groups, to raise funds for the Prince of Wales Youth Club and to provide an enjoyable community gathering at the same time. Thus, there were stalls for the Acorn Café, the Friends of St Stephen's Church, the League of Friends, the WI, the Guides and Brownies, the Friends of Beverley Meadow, St Michael's Road Area Residents' Association and our own Residents' Association. Each group had a stall – plants, bric a brac, toys, books and so on and we had entertainment from the Lemon Zingers Choir.

The inestimable Jane provided cakes and others brought sandwiches, sausage rolls and other delectable food and we raised £400 for the Youth Club. Just as important was the opportunity to get together as a community and provide a lovely venue, decorated and with fresh flowers by Julie Boards, for friends to meet and new friends to be made.



From the left: The Lemon Zingers in great voice, the Friends of St Stephen's Church and a splendid cake selection from the WI!